Faculty Senate: Task Force on Transforming Campus Culture
Executive Summary
February 8th, 2022

Introduction

Jamie Riley's departure from the University and (perhaps more importantly) the way the leadership of the University reacted to the departure (with very little transparency) seemed to me to be partially motivated by race, and most likely related to politics. That is, the incident was not about Riley's ability to do his job, but about something else. It was certainly a difficult decision, and I understand that Riley's values were likely always in conflict with the values of members of UA's leadership. I think it's worth revisiting the entire process: how we recruit members of historically underrepresented groups for positions of leadership, how we vet them, how we make hiring decisions, and how we react when things go poorly. I've seen the chilling effect our handling of this incident has had on applications for faculty positions. I hope we can learn something from it and improve.*

*Italicized block quotes are verbatim survey responses.

The Task Force to Transform Campus Culture (hereafter "the Task Force") is an ad hoc committee created by the Faculty Senate on October 15, 2019, to investigate the negative aspects of our campus climate and make recommendations to the UA Administration with approval of the Senate. The Task Force investigated experiences or patterns of behavior that have contributed to feelings of marginalization, threat, danger, and invisibility.

The Task Force currently comprises nine members: Leah Cheatham, Barbara Dahlbach, Litsa Cheimariou, Brittany Gilmer, Sundar Krishnan, Christopher Lynn, Russel Peterson, Regina Range and Alyxandra Vesey. Past members contributing to this report and recommendations are: Wanda Burton, Greg Cottrell, Heather Gunn, Kelly Guyotte, Latrise Johnson, Michael Altman, and Jenny Duckworth. The Task Force chose governance by committee rather than by chairperson, and meetings were convened bimonthly.

Procedures

Task Force activities included:
- Organizing Interactive Campus Culture Forum to solicit input from campus stakeholders through campus mapping, story booth, small group discussions, and other means;
- Developing and administering campus culture surveys of faculty and staff (spring 2020 and 2021) and students (spring 2020);
- Analyzing findings from the two faculty/staff surveys ($n = 1346$) and student survey ($n = 391$), as well as the Interactive Campus Culture Forum ($n = {\sim}40$); and
- Composing recommendations for enhancing inclusion and reducing harm on campus.

In the interest of informing recommendations through diverse campus stakeholder priorities, the Task Force sought initial input through an Interactive Campus Culture Forum in February 2020. This forum invited students, faculty, and staff to engage in various activities centered around campus culture, including: a heat-mapping activity where participants indicated their feelings of safety or unease across campus; a story booth where a participant could record a narrative related to campus culture; a 'marker sparker' activity, where participants wrote brief, anonymous statements about campus culture to display on a wall; and small group discussions, where several groups of 8-12 participants engaged in structured focus group discussions around campus culture. This forum also served as an opportunity to pilot campus culture surveys that were subsequently shared across campus.

The campus culture surveys were formally distributed across campus first in Spring, 2020, and again in Spring, 2021. These surveys were informed by previously validated campus climate surveys, with subsequent refinement

to target the needs of University of Alabama constituents. The 2020 Faculty & Staff Campus Culture Survey included 45 close-ended questions and 3 open-ended questions. Due to insufficient response from staff as well as underrepresented faculty groups, the survey was shortened and redeployed in the spring of 2021. The revised 2021 Faculty & Staff Campus Culture Survey included 37 close-ended questions and 3 open-ended questions. All surveys were administered online through Qualtrics.

Results

The 2020 Faculty & Staff Campus Culture survey received 679 responses (83% faculty; 17% staff), whereas the 2021 Faculty & Staff Campus Culture Survey received 717 responses (41% faculty; 59% staff). In total, the campus response rate on each of these survey distributions was approximately 10%.

While not all respondents chose to disclose demographic data, those who did (2020: ~85%; 2021: ~90%) reported were mostly women who identified as White. It is important to note that the Task Force actively solicited responses from traditionally underrepresented groups (through campus affinity groups). These response rates closely mirror campus demographics according to race.

Select Quantitative Findings

Results from two selected questions from 2021 survey are presented in the following charts: "How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall campus climate/environment at the University of Alabama within the past 12 months?" and "I feel a sense of belonging".

Figures 2 and 4 present responses from the total sample, whereas Figures 3 and 5 break down the sample according to gender identity, sexual orientation, and race and ethnicity to investigate specific trends in underrepresented groups. To mitigate the risk of identification of individuals and due to space reasons, responses from certain groups were aggregated. Gender identity was grouped in Man, Woman, and other-non-binary which included gender nonbinary, agender, not listed, self-description, and not disclosed. Sexual orientation was grouped in straight and LGBTQAI (asexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, pansexual, queer, questioning/unsure, same-gender loving, not listed, and not disclosed), whereas race and ethnicity included White, Black or African American, and Other (American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latinx or Spanish Origin, Not Hispanic or Latinx or Spanish Origin, Multiracial, not listed, not disclosed, and unknown).

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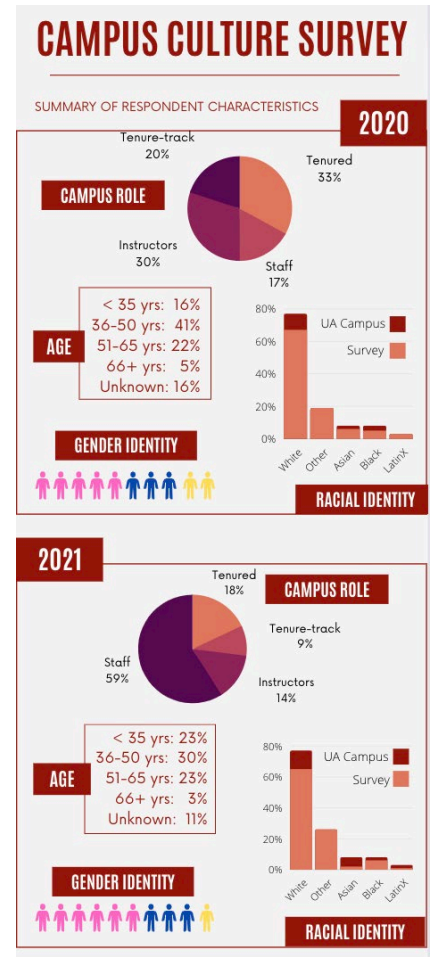
To the question "*How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall campus climate/environment at the University of Alabama within the past 12 months?"* overall, respondents indicated being satisfied or neutral (Figure 2). However, when broken down, as Figure 3 shows, the majority of those who indicated less satisfaction belong to underrepresented groups.
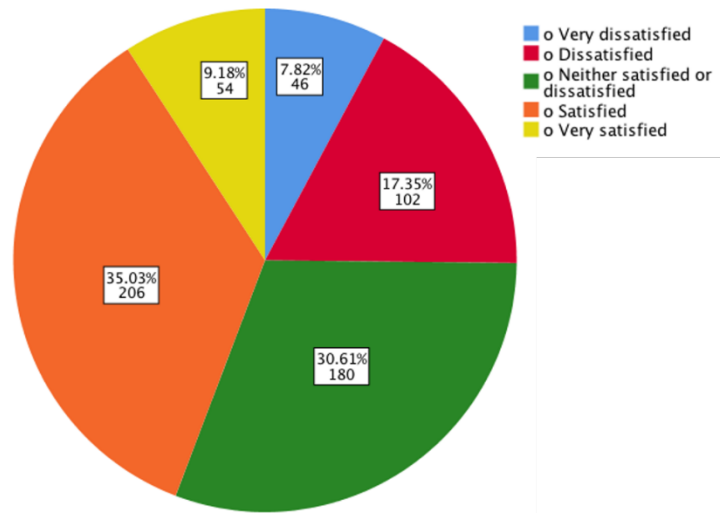

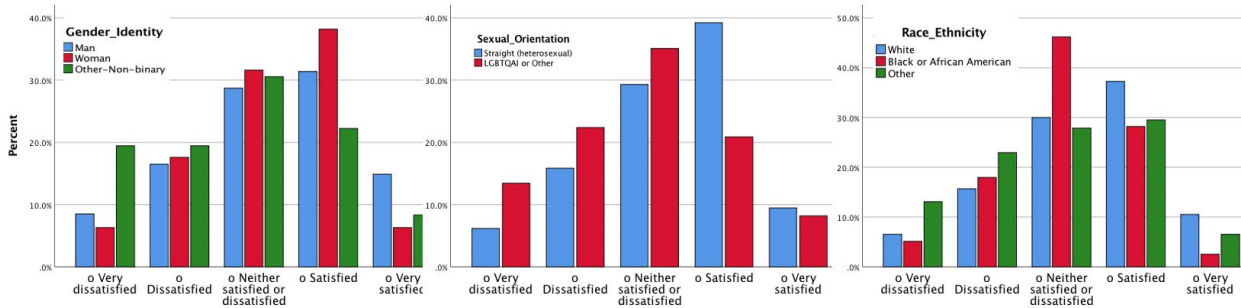Figure 2. Responses from total sample in survey 2021.

Figure 3.

Figure 3. Responses to "*How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall campus climate/environment at the University of Alabama within the past 12 months?*" broken down in groups.

For the statement "I feel a sense of belonging", overall, respondents reported that they somewhat agreed or neither agreed or disagreed with the statement (Figure 4). But similar to the previous question, the majority of those who reported that they strongly disagree/disagree belong to underrepresented groups (Figure 5).
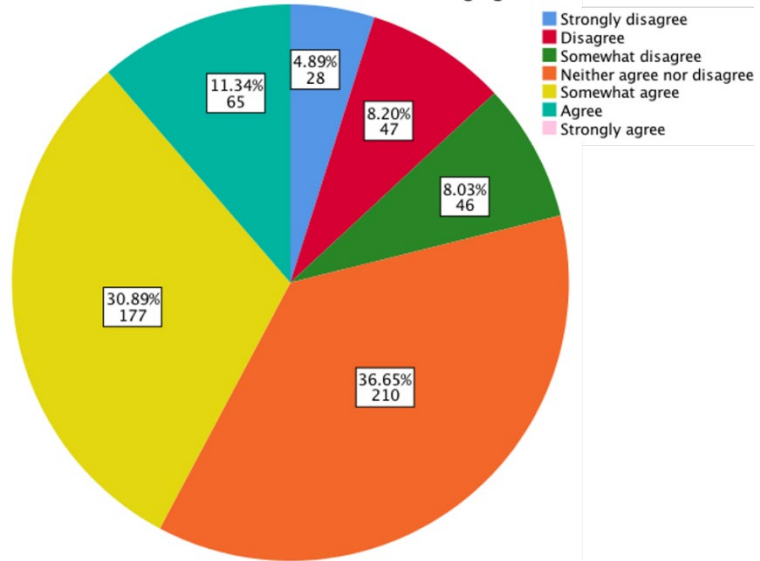

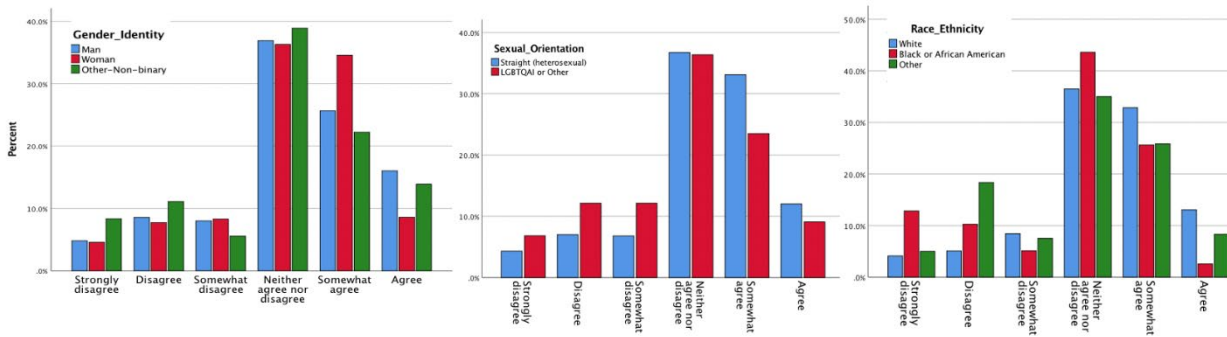Figure 4. Responses from total sample in survey 2021.

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Figure 5. Responses to "*I feel a sense of belonging*" broken down in groups.

Select Qualitative Findings

Conducting an inductive coded analysis of the written responses to the survey questions better illustrated the nuances of campus culture as experienced by survey respondents. Broadly, the written responses highlighted a negative trending view of leadership at the staff, department, college, and university levels. There were no positive comments at the staff level and seven (7) negative comments. At the Department level there were eight (8) positive and twelve (12) negatives. Scaling up, there were no positive comments about leadership at the College level and eleven (11) negative comments. Last, there were three (3) positive comments about leadership at the University level and thirteen (13) negative comments. These numbers suggest that the Department level had the most balanced views of leadership whilst respondents had the most unfavorable views of leadership at the upper levels of administration—the College and University levels.
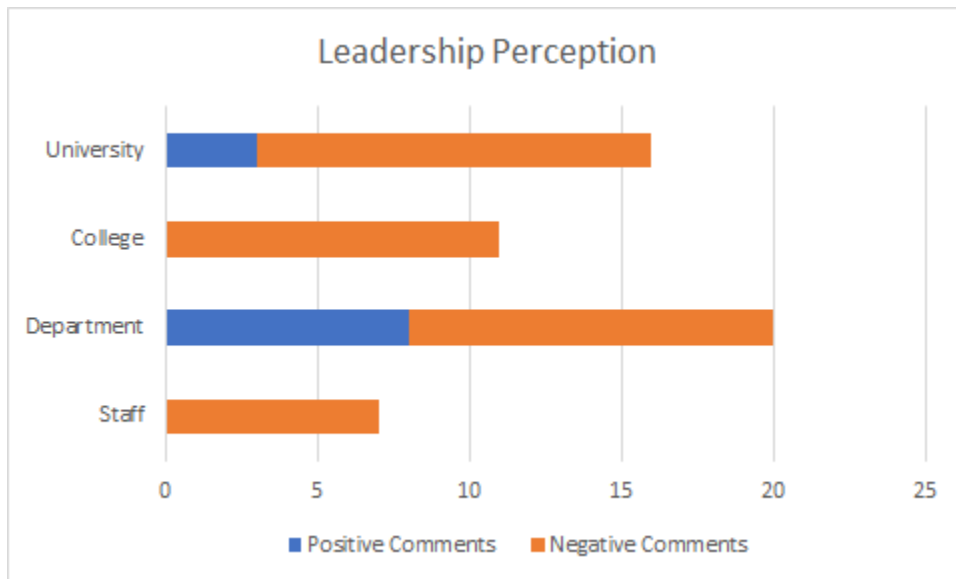
The negative responses about leadership at the various levels appears to be tied to a more general culture of mistrust that leadership neither has the ability nor the desire to address incidents of bias on campus. Seventeen survey participants described experiencing an incident of bias where they felt discriminated against due to their identities. Similarly, eighteen survey participants report having witnessed another member of campus being

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discriminated against due to their identities. Broadening the scope of the analysis, we were able to extract and categorize the following aspects of identities associated with survey respondents' experiences of discrimination and misconduct on campus: ableism (25), academic misconduct (1), ageism (28), gender discrimination (15), gender discrimination non-binary (3), gender discrimination women (84), hate speech (18), homophobia (24), nativism (14), racism (120), religious animus (24), sexual harassment (25), and transphobia (14). These findings suggest that racism remains the form of discrimination and misconduct most reported on campus, followed by gender discrimination against women.
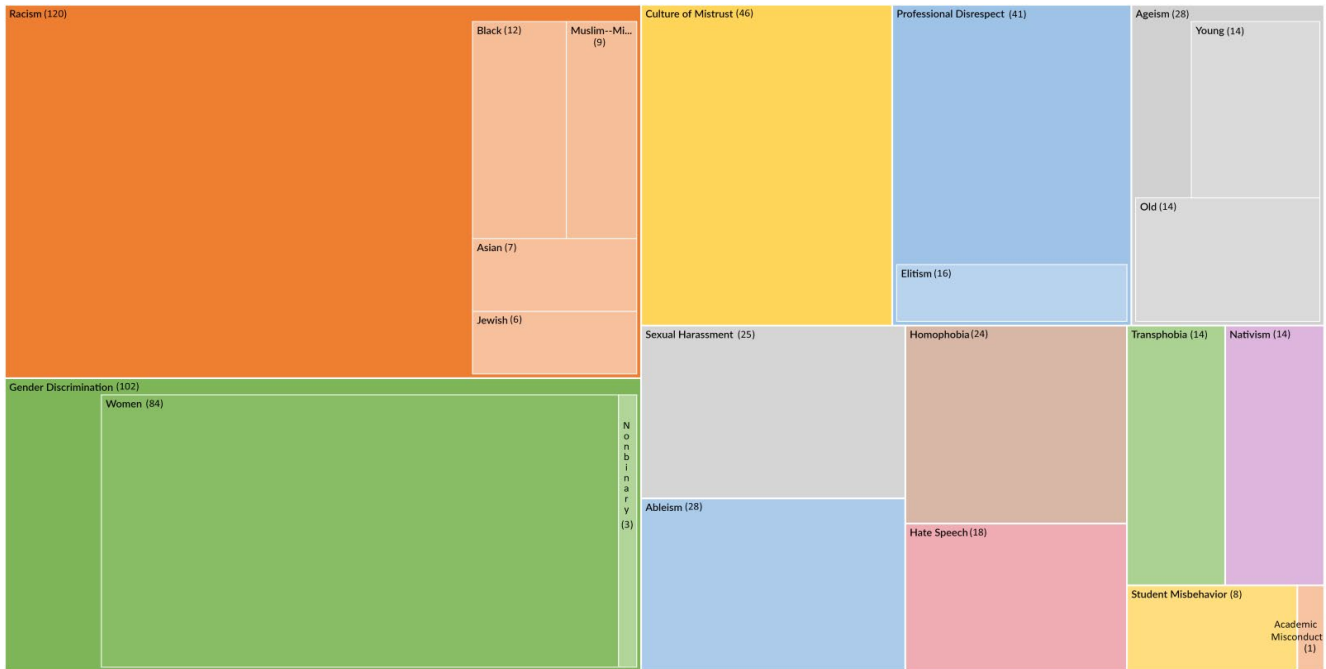

Figure 7. Number of references to incidents of bias, coded as the following categories.

Recommendations

One-Year Recommendations

1. Implement University-wide DEI training for administrators and search committees
2. Implement University-wide HR training for chairs, deans, and administrative faculty
3. Fix physical accessibility issues in University buildings and campus grounds
4. Promote renamed University buildings to incoming freshmen and new employees
5. Enlist an independent organization to annually conduct campus climate surveys to respond to campus culture's needs, **OR**
6. Formalize Taskforce as a permanent committee

Five-Year Recommendations

1. Launch University-wide first-year course about UA's efforts to change its racist history, **OR**
2. Mandate all incoming freshmen take Hallowed Grounds tour
3. Hire non-partial HR representatives for each academic unit
4. Increase administrative staff to address lack of response or transparency around reporting Title IX and EEOC violations
5. Create climate of support for faculty and staff who fear retaliation
   a. Retaliation against reporting workplace infractions
   b. Retaliation against practicing free speech online
6. Reframe DEI's benefits for entire University community and not just for underrepresented groups
7. Staff should be compensated at rates which are competitive regionally and across institutions

Task Force Recommendations: One-Year Action Items and Supporting Data

••• Implement University-wide DEI training for administrators and search committees •••

Lack of consistent information and training surrounding the hiring process

    a. **Action Item:** Create a LMS compliance training module for all search committee chairs and members which would include aspects concerning DEI, foreign hires, appropriate interview questions and the actual hiring process (timeline) to be completed for every committee experience.

    b. **Action Item:** Training should be mandatory, not optional, before receiving the password to view vitas and should be completed once per academic year for those serving on a search committee.

    c. **Action Item:** Consistency, through standardized dissemination of information, of what a balanced committee membership should be, especially on search committees.

    d. **Action Item:** Training of administrators in what a diverse committee should be beyond race, specifically African Americans.

[T]he fact that the only type of diversity acknowledged on search committees is Black identification is absurd. I once was on a committee with people with backgrounds in four different continents, but according to the guidelines, the committee wasn't diverse unless one of the members was Black.

Underrepresented faculty and staff are over-serviced, particularly on search committees.

    a. **Action Item:** Provide some protection to over-serviced people and release them of other service.

    b. **Action Item:** Consider workload adjustments and tenure processes that are more responsive to service and DEI work (within and beyond campus)

For the POC that don't flee Tuscaloosa in the first few years, they are asked to serve on way more service responsibilities to diversify the charges. This needs to be mitigated with less service work elsewhere. Also, the fact that the only type of diversity acknowledged on search committees is Black identification is absurd. I once was on a committee with people with backgrounds in four different continents, but according to the guidelines, the committee wasn't diverse unless one of the members was Black.

••• Implement University-wide HR training for chairs, deans, and administrative faculty •••

Concerns over faculty, usually assistant/associate deans, who have been given HR responsibilities are not properly trained in HR responsibilities. There is also a perceived conflict of interest as these people often supervise the same people who need a nonpartial HR representative.

    a. **Action Item:** Professionally trained HR personnel be hired to fill these rolls for each division or combination of division.

My hard work on a search committee has been undermined. Unfortunately, even after communicating this to HR via email, and having had the opportunity to speak with HR in person, I never received a resolution. The question in this survey "do we know where to go to for help", as you can see, is misleading. Staff/faculty may know where to go, but that doesn't really mean much if after you pour your heart out describing demeaning and humiliating acts, there is no follow-up and no resolution.

••• Fix physical accessibility issues in University buildings and campus grounds •••

Physical accessibility issues in buildings and on the grounds.

    a. **Action Item:** Continual survey of grounds and repair of issues when identified. Large issues like inaccessible classrooms are being addressed slowly, but impediments such as roots pushing up sidewalks, repaved roads that are not level with remaining surfaces, puddled water on ramps, present challenges to people who have mobility issues.

    b. **Action Item:** Establishment of a place on campus that anticipates campus needs and makes proactive alterations that make others feel included (i.e., universal design).

    c. **Action Item:** Accessibility needs to be evaluated and addressed beyond "compliance."

UA moves available parking away from buildings and clusters them all out of the way. This makes is hard to get access to actual work buildings. They only care about their legal status, not access. Several of the systems, such as clocking, are geared toward non disabled individuals and are difficult to use, causing me to need more edits to my time sheet which is monitored . . . the system doesn't recognize that I always have breathing issues.

Temporary disabilities made me very aware of how inaccessible the campus is for injured or physically challenged people. One retired faculty member said that she retired because of how far away she had to park and carry her things to her office.

••• Promote renamed University buildings to incoming freshmen and new employees •••

Confusion by students and faculty surrounding why buildings on campus are being renamed.
      a. **Action Item:** Follow through with historical plaques describing the previous names, including why the original names were given and why the names have been changed.

The university was supposed to be looking into changing names of a number of buildings which were named after people who were racists and had racist connections...[s]ymbols are important and the fact that the university administration appears to have dragged its feet on this issue suggests that it did not want to make the changes.

••• Conduct independent, annual campus climate surveys to respond to campus culture's needs •••
OR
••• Formalize Taskforce as a permanent committee •••

Periodic surveys of campus culture and community sentiment.
      a. **Action Item:** Have this survey conducted periodically by independent organizations for continuous improvement of campus culture (with results shared broadly and consistently with the campus community).
      b. **Action Item:** Formalization of campus culture taskforce into a permanent committee (with charge to receive and interpret these data and strategically coordinate with assessment entity to identify possible implementation strategies for recommended changes).

I hope the UA System Office and/or the Board of Trustees takes this type of survey seriously so the campus climate may continue to improve.

What's the point – Nothing changes

Task Force Recommendations: Five-Year Action Items and Supporting Data

••• Launch University-wide first-year course about UA's efforts to change its racist history •••
OR
••• Mandate all incoming freshmen take Hallowed Grounds tour •••

The current UA motto of "Where Legends are Made" is focused solely on positive personalities while ignores the less desirable "Legends" of the University which is part of the history of UA.
      a. **Action Item:** The history of the University be incorporated into one of the core classes, including mandating the "Hallowed Grounds walking tour." (Video tour)

There will never be a perception that the University is diverse or cares about diversity when our President and Vice Presidents are almost all older white men, and we cater relentlessly to wealthy alums who insist on keeping our Greek organizations as white as possible. We need a more diverse student body and leadership to ever hope to change perceptions of UA--and even more so to change the realities.

••• Hire non-partial HR representatives for each academic unit •••
••• Create climate of support for faculty and staff who fear retaliation •••

Fear of retaliation for reporting any infractions is a common theme.

     a. **Action Item:** UA could/should provide independent ombudspersons at unit/division/departmental/college levels who can provide an impartial conduit for fearlessly reporting any infractions without any possibility of retaliatory reactions

     b. **Action Item:** Allow faculty and staff to report infractions to ombudspersons outside of their unit/division/department if they feel more comfortable doing so.

[REDACTED] has been extremely aggressive during the recent budget cuts. 'Certain people' (including myself) have been coerced into giving up salary to help the College pay for expenses. It is made very clear that if we do not cooperate 'some jobs' may need to be eliminated...It is extremely troubling. Many faculty are extremely distressed, but no one is brave enough to speak up for fear of risking their job.

... general fear of retribution for forwarding ideas that do not align with whatever mission our chair/associate chair might have ...

BULLYING. Staff are considered "disposable" where faculty are hard to come by and therefor getaway with awful behavior. Then staff are afraid to say anything because they live paycheck to paycheck and desperately need their jobs and would not be able to find another one so easily as faculty do. Plus,the people who would receive the complaints do the same thing.

UA culture must be founded on a continually improved process of active inclusion of a variety of opinions, perspectives, and viewpoints at "the academic discussion table."

     a. **Action Item:** Inclusion should be actively promoted as a central component of all aspects of university functioning, including but not limited to: academic affairs, research, service, and extracurricular activities

[T]he overall feeling is that you should not express conservative or Christian political views for fear of retaliation.

I am legitimately fearful that if I were to come out in opposition of certain ideas or beliefs that seem to be held and encouraged by UA, that it would result in some kind of disciplinary action.

••• Increase administrative staff to address lack of response or transparency around reporting Title IX and EEOC violations •••

Despite mandatory training and web pages of instructions, there is a lack of understanding of how and where to report violations of University policies regarding harassment, Title IX and EEOC complaints.

     a. **Action Item:** Evaluate training materials and webpages for lack of effectiveness and rewrite to correct deficiencies.

Dissatisfaction with the Title IX process and perceived lack of action. There is a misunderstanding between what constitutes a legal definition of a Title IX violation vs what might constitute "harm to a person."

a. **Action Item:** Incorporate the legal standards vs causing harm into the required compliance training.

b. **Action Item:** Final reports/outcomes from the Title IX investigation should provide more explanation for the finding, especially if they find no legal violations.

I have reported many of these issues to Title IX and the the EEOC office. The reporting process has not been very straightforward. I made my original report in Summer of 2019 and I did not hear any type of follow-up until I reported an additional allegation. [REDACTED] I finally received a findings report in February 2020. I could not get any clarity about the investigation process even though I asked multiple times. I have no idea what the investigation entailed given that many of the people that I listed as witnesses in my reports were never contacted by anyone conducting the investigation.

I had a title 9 case due to gender and age related sexual harassment/general harassment. I never found out how it was resolved.

••• Reframe DEI's benefits for entire University community and not just for underrepresented groups •••

The tenants of diversity, equity and inclusion are perceived as threatening to a significant portion of white faculty and staff respondents, rather than as qualities that make the University competitive and enrich our campus community.

a. **Action Item:** Similar to the "Capstone Creed" for students, there should also be a unifying standard of integrity, fairness, and respect for how faculty and staff regard and treat each other. Emphasize that diversity, equity, and inclusion is for everyone, regardless of political views, religious affiliations, racial backgrounds, gender identities, etc.

Critical race theory propagation, diversity exercises and bias against political affiliation, heterosexuality, and Caucasians, and hyper-sensitivity to racial and sexual issues, have divided our campus and must be eliminated.

Dividing us all into little groups of victimhood is abhorrent and the University should be ashamed of itself. There is only one subset of this population where it is not only tolerated, but in some cases openly encouraged to discriminate, hate, and blame for everyone else's situation in life.

This kind of "survey" and the "inclusion" ideology that ostracizes and demonizes anyone who does not fall in line to the "correct" way of thinking will only cause an inevitable clash in society. They ironic hypocrisy of it all is so incredibly disheartening. The worst part is you know it's true. Right now, reading this, you know exactly what you're doing. But you justify it one way or another and are everything you claim to be against.

I believe, as a conservative Christian, that I cannot talk about my opinions on issues and events as freely as my more liberal colleagues. I could cite examples, but I don't believe it would matter.

••• Staff should be compensated at rates which are competitive regionally and across institutions •••

Staff are the glue that holds the University together, but UA staff rates are not competitive.

a. **Action Item:** Pay staff fair market value.

Staff are not compensated fairly for their work. This contributes to inequity. Only those from relatively privileged backgrounds can afford to work for low wages for an extended period of time.

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I have never felt valued by any leadership or admin higher than my department. I feel that the lower your pay grade/title the more you do and less you are valued, especially when it comes to raise and promotion. We are the ones that throughout COVID have had to be on campus to just be in the building while leadership was working from home and it just feels very unseen.

Morale is at an all-time low. There are good, young, quality employees that I know of who are looking to leave UA as soon as they can because the environment is so toxic, non-rewarding, and there is no opportunity for career advancement. I hope this survey uncovers some very troubling issues that exist on campus at the moment.